

Coyotes and Practitioners

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Practitioners may deal with animal owners whose pet(s) were attacked or lost to coyotes. Some attacks occur in front of the owners' eyes. Coyotes may roam neighborhoods in search of small domestic animals as they are often easier to capture than wildlife. After such episodes and/or local sightings of coyotes in a neighborhood people realize the coyote is a predator and become fearful. Some suspect that it is not the coyote population that's increasing but rather their boldness. Coyote attacks on pets generally increase in the spring and summer.

Urban Coyotes

It is believed that more than 5,000 coyotes exist in the City of Los Angeles. Thousands more live in Los Angeles County outside the City of Los Angeles. Most coyotes live in the foothill region, therefore, those communities have the most problems with coyotes. The coyote is also known as the prairie wolf in open lands. In the face of man's persecution, most wild carnivores have retreated as their habitat has been destroyed; however, the coyote has expanded its range during the last century.

The coyote is highly intelligent, has excellent sensory capabilities and has the ability to adapt to change. Its capability to survive on a variety of food has proved to be invaluable also. Coyotes are now found from Alaska to Costa Rica and have spread eastwards to the Atlantic seaboard. They were seen in New York State in 1925 and joined wildlife in the Bronx in the 1990s. Coyotes began showing up in West Tennessee in the late 1960s and reached Nashville in the early 1980s.

Coyotes typically avoid people but may become brazen if they are hungry or diseased. Dry riverbeds, washes, storm drains and canals often serve as a highway for coyotes and other wild animals in the urban area. Golf courses are another habitat for

urban coyotes. The coyote's intelligence and versatility has made it capable of living in close association with people, who are the coyote's main enemy.

In the foothills, it is not uncommon to find a coyote dead along the road as a result of being hit by a car. Although hunters themselves, coyotes may be killed by larger predators such as wolves, pumas and golden eagles. Coyotes often bark at dawn and dusk year round. One starts with a series of short barks, gradually increasing in volume until they merge into a long yell. Other coyotes may join in and the chorus continues for a minute or two.

Urban Wildlife

Misunderstanding occasionally develops regarding urban wildlife. Wildlife found in the city have often spend their entire lives in the city. Other wildlife has adapted to city life and a changing food source. Opossums, not endemic to California, are commonly found in the City of Los Angeles. These opossums typically are born and raised in the city. As the animals are nocturnal, they are active during the middle of the night when most of us are sleeping. Occasionally people report seeing giant rats at night but these sightings are likely opossums.

Predator

An adult coyote weights about **thirty** pounds and measures about four feet from nose to tail-tip. Coyotes are carnivores and eat: carrion, rabbits, voles, rats, mice and other small rodents. Farmers and livestock producers worry about coyotes killing poultry and small stock. Coyotes eat carrion and have been seen feeding on carcasses of large animals, such as cattle, but the coyote is too small to kill such an animal.

In urban areas, coyotes have a similar diet which can be supplemented with: garbage, feeding by people, feeding from food left out for pets and killing small pets. Zoos

have problems with coyotes preying on animal exhibits. In 1987 coyotes destroyed fifty-three flamingos at the Los Angeles Zoo. In past years coyotes have killed penguins and other animals at the Los Angeles Zoo. In 1995, coyotes killed flamingos and a two-year-old Andean condor in the Los Angeles Zoo in Griffith Park. After the 1995 problem the zoo installed a six and a half mile perimeter fence around their facility to keep wildlife out.

While the farmer may be worried about his livestock, the city dweller is worried about his or her pets as coyotes have been known to capture and consume cats and small dogs. The coyote's need for food increases while raising litters during the spring and summer months and they may travel several miles to obtain the necessary food for their young.

Breeding

Coyotes whelp in the early spring and both the male and female look after the litter. Litter sizes depend on the environment and food supply. In lean years, a litter of two is average, while in abundant years they have larger litters. Pups are usually born by the first of June.

Coyotes often move into residential areas during the December-March mating season. Breeding begins when coyotes are a year old and they pair for life. They mate between January and April and the pups are born two months later. They may have ten or more in a litter but most litters are much smaller. The father stays with the family, bringing food, first for the mother, then for the pups which is regurgitated to them as a partly-digested mess. Both parents assist in feeding the young. Generally they spend the day near their den and travel in the evening looking for food.

Reducing Coyote Problems

There are several things that can be done

to reduce the loss of pets to coyotes. The only nonlethal control method which is consistently effective is total separation of predators from potential prey. Coyotes are wary and adaptable, making them difficult to trap. Trapping and euthanasia is considered a last resort. In coyote inhabited areas of the city it is recommended that small pets be kept indoors and outdoor food supplies be limited to discourage predators. It is illegal to feed predatory wild animals in the City of Los Angeles. There are several additional things pet owners can do to discourage coyotes (table 1)

Diseases Seen in Coyotes

Some of the diseases detected in coyotes in Los Angeles County include: babesiosis, blastomycosis, canine hepatitis, hepatozoon, histoplasmosis, hookworms scabies, plague and American trypanosomiasis.

Since 1986, 23 coyotes (5.18% of those tested) have tested positive for plague with antibody titers of 1: 16 or higher by HA/HI to *Yersinia pestis*. Several of the coyotes were from locations within the City of Los Angeles. A known endemic foci of bubonic plague is the Griffith Park area. Other plague positive sites include: Burbank, Glendale, La Canada-Flintridge, San Marino, and Sunland.

A few diseases detected in coyotes were not known to exist in Los Angeles County in people or animals. This knowledge helps in developing prevention programs for the future. With some diseases, the incubation period varies greatly, making it difficult to determine its source when people move from one location to another. For example, blastomycosis, with its variable incubation period, was not thought to exist in California before its detection in coyotes. Tracing specific exposure for human patients is difficult.

Coyote Attacks

Coyote attacks on domestic animals occur in Los Angeles County with most reports involving pet animals; however, chickens, pigeons and other small animals can fall prey to coyotes if left unprotected. Occasionally, predator kills may be suspected to be involved in satanic rites and are investigated by various agencies.

Coyotes may also attack people. In 1979, a coyote attempted to drag a 13-month-old baby out of a yard in Agoura. In 1981, a coyote killed a 3-year-old girl in her Glendale yard. In 1995 there were several coyote attacks on people in Griffith Park. In April of this year, an 8-year-old Scottsdale, Arizona boy was nipped on the face by a coyote in front of his house, less than a block from where a 3-year-old boy was bitten two days earlier.

Rabies

Rabies has been detected continuously in California wildlife since 1921. Between 1950 and 1995 there were twenty-eight rabid coyotes detected in California. One out of four was from San Diego County. Rabies can spill over at the border between Mexico and the San Diego County. A similar problem is seen in Arizona and Texas. Rabid coyotes were believed to be the source of an eleven year rabies epidemic in dogs along the Baja California-California Border (1959-1970).

In 1921, the City of Los Angeles diagnosed sixteen rabid dogs. The origin of the outbreak was thought, "...to have been coyotes or other wild animals coming in from the hills north of the city."

Rabies Outbreak in Texas

In January of 1995, the Texas Department of Health declared a rabies quarantine with at least eighteen counties reporting rabies in coyotes and dogs. Emergency rules prohibited the movement of various animals within Texas. Two people died of canine rabies in Texas during the four years prior to the quarantine and about 15,000 people received rabies treatment in south Texas prior to the quarantine. The outbreak moved north into Texas from the Mexican border.

At a cost of \$2.3 million, the Texas Department of Health started an emergency air drop of coyote bait containing oral rabies vaccine that year. Rabid coyotes from Texas were thought to be responsible for an outbreak of rabies in Florida in 1994 in which six dogs died of rabies and twenty-six people received post-exposure rabies treatment.

References

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2. Coyote Control. Zoo Scape. April 1995
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4. Sowers C. 2nd Boy Suffers Bite from Urban Coyote. The Arizona Republic 4/16/97
5. Translocation of Coyote Rabies - Florida, 1994. MMWR 44(31):580-82, August 11, 1995
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Table 1: Keeping Coyotes and Pets Apart

1. In coyote areas, keep small pets indoors and don't let them out at night unsupervised. Most coyote attacks occur at night.
2. Obey leash law and don't let pets roam. Roaming pets are more likely to be hit by cars, attacked by coyotes and poisoned.
3. Report coyote encounters to authorities. Coyote sightings and encounters are mapped by agencies. When sightings increase, authorities may issue community alerts.
4. Coyotes eat a wide variety of food. Pick up pet food left outside and take inside at night to avoid attracting unwanted guests. Remove fallen fruit, especially avocados, from yards. Store trash in containers with tight lids.
5. An enclosed backyard does not provide safety for small dogs unless fencing is sufficiently high. Low fencing allows pets to escape and stray animals to enter the yard. Coyotes and cats can scale fences looking for food or mischief.
6. Clear brush and dense weeds around the yard which provide shelter for coyotes and the rodents they hunt.
7. If you see a coyote stalking your pet yell and throw rocks at the coyote. Take your pet indoors.